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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 002677

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TAGS: [MARR](#) [MCAP](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [RP](#) [MASS](#)  
SUBJECT: PHILIPPINE MILITARY OPERATIONS IN SOUTHERN  
PHILIPPINES PRODUCING RESULTS

REF: MANILA 1999

Classified By: Amb. Kristie A. Kenney, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: Recent successes by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in the southern Philippines have disrupted terrorist networks in Mindanao and destroyed known terrorist camps in the Sulu Archipelago. In the last five weeks, combined military and police efforts in Mindanao, supported by U.S. personnel, led to the capture of senior Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) facilitator Hajiruddin Dansalan and suspected Bangladeshi JI member Muhammad Alpariz. On December 7, nearly simultaneous AFP offensives were conducted against high-value ASG members on Jolo island and an ASG group involved in numerous kidnappings on Basilan island. While details of the events are still emerging, it appears that five Philippine troops were killed in action and dozens wounded, and more than 50 enemy fighters may have been killed in the two engagements. Although the Jolo and Basilan operations indicate an improved capability for the AFP to plan and execute offensives against entrenched terrorist targets, the lack of casualty evacuation and intelligence assets point to a continued need for USG assistance in these key areas. END SUMMARY.

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JEMAAH ISLAMIYAH FACILITATORS APPREHENDED  
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2. (C) The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) have continued to chart successes against terrorist group members in Mindanao, most recently with the capture of Indonesian Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) member Hajiruddin Dansalan, and suspected Bangladeshi JI member Muhammad Alpariz. Dansalan was arrested on November 2 and Alpariz was apprehended on December 2, both as a result of close coordination between the Philippine military and police, with support from USG personnel. While U.S.-designated terrorist organization JI does not have a large number in the Philippines, the organization continues to use Philippine sanctuary for training and transit.

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CLASHES SUBSIDE ON MINDANAO -- FOCUS ON JOLO, BASILAN  
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3. (C) While AFP troops on Mindanao continue to pursue rogue Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) commanders in Lanao del Norte and Maguindanao (reftel), encounters between Philippine troops and MILF forces have subsided over the last two weeks, with AFP units taking up blocking positions and MILF rogue fighters retreating into mountain and marsh

redoubts. On Jolo and Basilan, however, isolated pockets of Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) terrorists -- some harbored by what the AFP calls lawless MILF elements -- have continued to conduct bombings, ambushes, and kidnappings against Philippine military personnel and civilians. To combat these insurgents, on December 7 the Philippine military conducted joint operations against these ASG targets on Basilan and Jolo.

14. (C) Despite a robust early warning network of human informants and difficult terrain protecting the ASG positions on Jolo, the AFP strike successfully employed artillery and ground troops against the camp of ASG commander Radullan Sahiron, located in the Patikul region of Jolo island. At the request of the AFP, USG assets supplied intelligence and planning assistance for the attack, which disrupted ASG operations and resulted in at least five ASG members killed, none of whose identities has been reported yet. The AFP suffered no casualties in the assault, and there are indications that there were additional ASG losses, without further detail of wounded and killed.

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BASILAN FIGHTING TOUGH GOING  
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15. (C) The intense two-day engagement between Philippine troops and ASG and MILF elements on Basilan island produced several firefights and underscored the difficulty the AFP is having in eradicating small but determined groups of insurgents from the Sulu Archipelago. The AFP operation

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against a group of Abu Sayyaf that conducted numerous kidnappings on Basilan over the last year resulted in large numbers of casualties on both sides, when the ASG fighters retreated into an area of Basilan controlled by lawless MILF elements. Combined AFP air, ground, and water-borne forces assaulted the ASG positions and secured several objectives, but the ASG and MILF forces counterattacked. In the fighting, the AFP suffered five Philippine troops killed and sustained more than two dozen wounded, several serious enough that USG assets were requested to transport them to Manila. Initial reports indicate the offensive may have killed 50 ASG and MILF insurgents -- including a rogue MILF commander -- although it is unclear whether the AFP was able to eliminate the kidnapping syndicate. While the MILF leadership denied its fronts are harboring ASG members, the AFP said that the death of MILF commander Sattar Alih, a senior member of the rebel group who was killed in the operation, pointed to the MILF's involvement with criminal activity on Basilan. The MILF accused the AFP of attacking its forces directly.

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COMMENT  
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16. (C) While the number of engagements in Central Mindanao decreased in the last month, perhaps indicating a consolidation of AFP forces and a retrenching of lawless MILF elements, the December 7 AFP offensives on Jolo and Basilan highlight the challenges still facing the Philippine government in the Sulu Archipelago. Detailed planning and preparation delivered a solid blow to a key ASG commander on Jolo, but the same level of planning for the Basilan operation produced mixed results and a high number of AFP casualties. It is clear that although the AFP has made great strides in conducting disciplined operations against terrorist targets -- there were no reported civilian casualties in either the Jolo or Basilan operation -- the Philippine military still lacks sufficient logistical support, intelligence platforms, and casualty evacuation capability to sustain effective counterterrorism operations on a consistent basis. Mission personnel continue to support the AFP in these areas and are working to identify specific long-term solutions to existing AFP deficiencies.

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